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# Contemporary Commercial Voice Pedagogy Applied to the Choral Ensemble: An Interview with Jeannette LoVetri

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# ON THE VOICE

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## SHARON HANSEN, EDITOR

### Contemporary Commercial Voice Pedagogy Applied to the Choral Ensemble: An Interview with Jeannette LoVetri

Compiled and edited by  
Neal W. Woodruff

**Compiler's note:** Jeannette LoVetri is Visiting-Artist-in-Residence at Shenandoah Conservatory and the founder of the first program on Contemporary Commercial Music (formerly called "non-classical") at the Conservatory, which is in Winchester, Virginia. The Contemporary Commercial Music Vocal Pedagogy Institute at Shenandoah was created in 2003 to address the needs of twenty-first century singing and teaching. The three-level courses offered during the Institute are called SomaticVoicework<sup>®</sup> The LoVetri Method, and are required in both the master of music and doctoral programs at Shenandoah. The summer Institute has attracted 500 people from ten countries and almost all the United States and has garnered accolades from speech language pathologists, choral conductors, music educators, singing teachers, and many professional singers from Broadway, opera, rock, jazz, and other styles. The Level I program of LoVetri's work is also offered annually at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

in the Department of Jazz and at the University of Michigan at the medical center in the Department of Speech Language Pathology. The program at the University of Michigan is the only program of vocal pedagogy to be offered in a university hospital setting.

LoVetri is in demand as one of the world's top specialists in training singers for contemporary commercial music (CCM) of all styles. Her expertise has been recognized worldwide through invitations for lectures at national and international symposia, seminars, and professional congresses, and for master classes at universities and conservatories.

Jeannette LoVetri is a faculty member at Drexel University College of Medicine, a position awarded her by Robert T. Sataloff, making her one of the few singing teachers in the world on a medical college faculty. In addition, she is a member of the Scientific Advisory Board of The Voice Foundation in Philadelphia. LoVetri is author of several articles of voice research published in the *Journal of Voice* and pedagogy articles published in the *Journal of Singing*. She is the author of a chapter in the book *The Performer's Voice* edited by Thomas Murry and Michael Benninger, published by Plural Publishing.

Those interested in pursuing greater depth on CCM styles may attend LoVetri's workshops at several major universities. A

more complete biography, a description of Somatic Voicework<sup>™</sup> The LoVetri Method, and listing of published research may be found at: <http://www.thevoiceworkshop.com/index.html>.

#### Contemporary Commercial Music

The most care-worn feud in the singing world is the erroneous disconnect between choral directors and teachers of singing. However, current-day preferences, trends, and practices have proffered a new and (needlessly) contentious debate: with the meteoric rise to prominence of popular musical styles, choral conductors and voice teachers must not only attend to the issue of period performance practice, but also negotiate the vocal requirements of Musical Theatre, jazz or show choir, and multi-ethnic (non-Western) literature.

It has long been presumed and taught that the classically-based voice techniques of Western culture could adequately and thoroughly serve the divergent needs of the singing world. However, some voice pedagogues are now asserting—with corroborating scientific evidence—that the functional requirements for contemporary singing are quite different from classical function.

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# ON THE VOICE

If classical vocal training is good for every kind of vocal sound, why don't opera singers get hired to sing in *Rent*, or *Hairspray* or *Suessical*, sounding like opera singers? Is everyone completely deaf? Don't they know the difference between the sounds of a classical singer and a pop/rock singer?<sup>1</sup>

Our naïve colleagues who say, "Singing is singing. If you have a solid classical technique, you can sing anything," are inviting vocal disaster if they impose classical vocal technique and sounds on the [contemporary] style of singing.<sup>2</sup>

Vocal music is a large artistic field where pop, rock, soul, world music, jazz occupy an important portion. The voice timbre varies widely depending on style of singing.<sup>3</sup>

Non-classical music continues to flourish within the culture at large. Popular singing styles have been in common coin as professional expectations for this century and the majority of the last. However, only in recent years have some university programs begun to embrace styles (and their corresponding techniques) that lie outside the canon of Western classical operatic and art song literature. As such, "Contemporary Commercial Music" is still an emerging discipline within voice pedagogy.

Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) refers broadly to "non-classical" musical genres: Musical Theatre, Jazz, Cabaret, Pop, Rock, Country, Folk, Gospel, Rhythm & Blues, Rap, and emerging styles. A number of highly publicized CCM-focused seminars and resources have developed in response to the increasing demands for CCM training, mostly outside the formal academic setting.<sup>4</sup> One of the most touted methods, and one that has found improving acceptance in academic circles, is taught by Jeannette LoVetri under the title: Somatic Voicework™ The LoVetri Method. As part of her research and advocacy, Jeannette (Jeanie) developed the title: *Contemporary Commercial Music*.

In 2000, I called for the elimination of the term "non-classical" with the idea that we needed to acknowledge all the styles of American music that have arisen to take their rightful place, without apology, alongside the great classical music of the world. I created the term "Contemporary Commercial Music" or CCM (with apologies to Contemporary Christian Music, Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, Craftsman Custom Metals, Classic Construction Models and about 45 other CCMs). The term "Contemporary," in the USA at least, refers most often to classical music of this and the twentieth century, but in Europe, it can mean either classical or not. "Commercial" music can mean anything, too. It can refer to music technology or the music business or it can mean music for a TV or radio commercial, so alone it could be confusing. However, both terms together had no other association, and the use of Contemporary Commercial Music as a generic term equal to "classical" has been very successful both here and abroad. It has allowed all of these styles to gain in credibility and those who teach them to be more validated in their search for new and established approaches.<sup>5</sup>

LoVetri is a stalwart and unapologetic advocate for the applied understanding of voice function, regardless of style. Studied and fluent with all vocal genres, she is perhaps currently best known for her scientific investigations of the CCM voice mechanism and the resulting pedagogy. She states:

There is now enough scientific backing to state what generally happens with the vocal mechanism in CCM and why it is possible to learn to belt effectively in a healthy manner, without necessarily losing the ability to sing classically. While no one has yet successfully had a career that

bounces back and forth between CCM and classical at the same time, it isn't unreasonable to say that at some point in the future that might happen.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the burgeoning quantity of data and the enduring professional cultivation of CCM styles, the incorporation of CCM techniques in applied voice pedagogy remains a controversial topic with many members of the singing profession. Part of the basis for this is the abiding myth that CCM singing is fundamentally unhealthy, even injurious to the serious singer. In 1966, the American Academy of Teachers of Singing (AATS) published a statement that reflected the opinions held during the middle part of the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup>

In recent years, the extraordinary development of communications and the commercial manipulation of public taste by the mass media have posed **new and serious problems for the singing teacher**. No one will deny the cultural benefits derived from radio, recordings, television, and cinema, but the power of these media to shape preferences and behavior has also had a pejorative influence. All who are directly or indirectly concerned with education in the performing arts and with the quality of aesthetic experience must take these influences into account.

**This statement centers on the field of so-called "popular singing." Such singing has altered drastically in the last twenty-five years.** In the 1920s, highly trained classical singers were prominent among the popular artists of the day. In the 1930s, the field expanded to include not only the traditional folk and classical singers, but also the new radio crooners. Their repertory, although tame by today's standards, was publicly attacked by the clergy for suggestive lyrics. **Their manner of singing was even questioned by organizations of voice teachers and music educators.**



Jazz, also derided then, is respected today and treated, quite rightly, as a significant cultural manifestation in the historical perspective of indigenous popular music. In addition, it is recognized that American popular song, emerging from Broadway, Tin Pan Alley and the cinema, relied, by and large, on a vocal technique rooted in folk or classical tradition.

The advent of Rock, together with an admixture of such vocal antecedents as blues, gospel, soul, and country-

western music, in combination with electronic instruments—which amplify sound to extremely high, overpowering levels—has developed in several generations of young people life styles, **vocal preferences, mannerisms and habits which are highly detrimental to normal vocal development and longevity.**<sup>8</sup> (Emphasis added)

Due to the misperception alleged in this 1966 proclamation, scarcely anything (if any) has been offered in terms of CCM pedagogical training within formal, academic circles

until recently. Only in 2008, did AATS issue the following updated statement:

Techniques for singing genres such as folk, gospel, blues, jazz, pop, and rock, which fall under a new heading called “Contemporary Commercial Music” (CCM), have been neither clearly defined nor seriously addressed in traditional voice pedagogy texts. While it is true that all singers must breathe, phonate, resonate, and articulate, they do not necessarily approach these technical elements in the same manner. Recent acoustic,

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# ON THE VOICE

physiologic, and pedagogic research challenges the widely-held belief that classically-based voice techniques alone can serve the world's diversity of singing styles.<sup>9</sup>

Jeanie LoVetri was invited to the exclusive membership of the American Academy of Teachers of Singing. However, the fracas continues, with egregious and uninformed words still being exchanged. Despite a palpable difference in attitude between the above 1966 and 2008 AATS publications, many teachers and singers, and even existing students, could mirror the narrative of LoVetri's training and often "thorny" journey.

## Journey

**Woodruff:** What fostered your interest in music, and singing specifically? Who were some of your early musical influences?

**LoVetri:** Both of my parents had nice voices and sang. My mother actually sang a few times on the radio and sang to me and with me as a child at home. My mother had been a professional dancer so I started with dance training at age three. My mother's sister was

a jazz vocalist in New Orleans, where the family is from, with Jack Teagarden's band. And I began piano at age ten, so music was always around.

I had good music training in public school, including many years of music theory. For example, we studied *Peter and the Wolf* in third grade, *Peer Gynt* in fourth grade and *Amahl and the Night Visitors* in fifth. I sang in choirs at school from the time I was in third grade, and several teachers encouraged my ability to sing. Additionally, I had a course in music analysis in my senior year of high school taught by Kenneth Wendrich who was also teaching at Yale. He gave us the same course materials that he used with the Yale students. We worked on *La Boheme*, Beethoven's *Eroica*, *Brandenburg No. 4* by Bach, and *Petruska*, taking them apart in various ways. When I attended the Manhattan School of Music (MSM), much of what I had learned in public school took me through all my freshman music courses.

**Woodruff:** Who were your primary voice instructors?

**LoVetri:** My first public performance was at age seven, but I didn't begin voice training until I was fifteen; I did sing a lot at home and

with the radio. I taught myself to sing with my idol, Connie Francis, although I couldn't really make the sounds she made. (Connie was a great belter; and I didn't figure out how to do that until I was in my late teens.)

My first teacher, Margaret Strong, was a traditionalist who lived in the next town. She gave me exercises to strengthen my stomach (like current day Pilates exercises) so that I would have good breath support. I had decent posture from my dance training and school gymnastics, and I was coordinated, so we didn't fuss too much with breathing after I got the hang of it. She didn't talk about "placement" or "resonance" or a special laryngeal position, but she did tell me to open my mouth on high notes and modify the closed vowels. We worked with a "smiley" approach, something I still use, and we worked on clear diction. Beyond that, I was on my own. It served me well enough to get two leads in local productions of musicals (*The Music Man* and *Show Boat*) and later to do another leading role as a belter in a community dinner theatre (*Bells Are Ringing*). By then, I had gotten into and quit MSM. I was very unhappy there; one year was all I could take. I should have been in a music theatre degree program, but, of course, in 1967, there were no such degrees. It was either study classical singing or learn to be an actor in drama school. I chose music because I loved to sing so much. My Wagnerian soprano teacher found me most uninteresting (being a light lyric coloratura with sticky high notes) and lacking in more ways than I could count.

**Woodruff:** What were some of your formative choral experiences?

**LoVetri:** Growing up, I sang in my church choir. I also played the organ for Catholic Mass, separately, from the age of twelve until I was twenty-three. I sang in school choruses right up until I graduated high school and then again at MSM under Kenneth Hickok, who had studied with Hindemith.

In high school, I was in concert chorus and madrigals, and the All-Connecticut Chorus. Our CC director was Gerry Mack (later Dr. Mack) whose doctoral project was



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After I got to NYC, I did a few "ringer" jobs. One was with the Philharmonic under Zubin Mehta. I sang in several NYC church choirs including Riverside Church and Marble Collegiate Church.

### Discovery

**Woodruff:** When did you develop an interest in Voice Pedagogy? In CCM?

**LoVetri:** After I quit MSM, I began commuting into NYC for voice lessons (I lived about an hour away). I had several teachers, all classical, and all with big reputations, who more or less did not know what to do with me, as I was not obviously a budding operatic star, although I only did classical repertoire in lessons. My voice was too light for heavier roles or repertoire but I did not have the notes above High C# that should have been easy for my light voice. I did my best to adapt to their various philosophies, many of which I found confusing or frustrating, but frequently found it difficult to keep things organized in my mind. I sang everything, all the time, and worked here and there in classical music, but without much sense of direction, and performed in whatever kind of music venue I could find. Somehow, my natural passion for singing and my desire to express myself musically always managed to surface and help me survive. Nevertheless, I felt frustrated and confused about singing a good deal of the time.

I got married when I was twenty-one, and, shortly after, I got a job singing on week-ends in a local restaurant. It was a German Rathskellar, and I joined the other singer (a tenor who sang in the Met Chorus and had a fantastic voice), the pianist, the violinist, and a man who played the zither, singing operetta favorites and doing a variety of other material every weekend. It was quite an experience! I was still seeking guidance. It was at this point that I began to study with

Dan Marek, who still teaches at Mannes College of Music in NYC. Marek had sung at City Opera and The Met and had attended the Mozartium in Augsburg. He was studying at that time with Cornelius Reid and was the first teacher to talk about the muscles in the throat and tell me that my sound was constricted. I was amazed to discover there were muscles involved with making sound and wondered what kind of muscles they were and what they did.

I read Reid's books and felt very excited that I was finally getting some kind of more or less concrete information about my voice. I was much encouraged to discover that there were people who had studied singing objectively and had worked to put together an approach towards learning to sing that was based on how the voice worked. I also read William Vennard's book, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technique*. I read them both many times in the early 70s. It was the beginning of my interest in vocal pedagogy, and I would say that this has remained an unquenchable thirst of mine for over three decades.

Since my earliest professional experiences were in music theatre, and since I sang popular music from the 1920s and '30s at home with my mother and later from the '50s and '60s with the radio in my room, I had a strong affinity for commercial music of all kinds. I had also been exposed to classical music from an early age at school and loved it, too. I really didn't want to have to choose one style of singing over another but all of my classical vocal teachers (there were eight teachers and six coaches) told me that you could not successfully do both. The "pop" styles were supposed to be ruinous to the voice.

Perhaps my absolute refusal to sing only classically was what limited me but I sang decently enough to audition and be accepted at MSM, and I had also performed in other places with classical material and been well received. Surely, I thought, there had to be some explanation as to why what I did was so different in each of these kinds of music, but no one had any answers for me. I thought, "Why was it so difficult to find information? Why hadn't someone figured

this conundrum out?"

Fortunately for me, in 1978, I blundered into the *Voice Foundation Symposium: Care of the Professional Voice*, which was held at that time at Juilliard. It was a life changing experience for me, to see all the charts, graphs, and photos of the larynx and vocal folds. I knew I had "come home" and spent the subsequent year counting the days to when I could go back. Now, of course, thirty-four years later, I am on the Scientific Advisory Board for the Voice Foundation. It was a wonderful eye opening experience way back when and has continued to be a very enriching part of my life over the decades.

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Despite the indifference or warnings from her teachers, LoVetri continued to explore the reality of the CCM concepts that were apparent in the professional world. For more than thirty years, she has researched the basics of voice function utilizing the same scientific methodology as notable classical voice scientists. This has garnered her significant recognition in the field of voice science, including exclusive AATS membership, The Van Lawrence Fellowship from NATS and The Voice Foundation, invitations to present at prestigious conferences, and the distinc-

tion of writing a chapter in a recent medically based book: *The Performer's Voice*.<sup>10</sup> Today, she continues to work diligently to dispel age-old myths about the health of CCM singing styles, and to foster better awareness of the fundamentals of vocal mechanics.

By simply ignoring belting and related styles, training for singing continued to remain unchanged up through the end of the twentieth century. Formal training programs in universities and conservatories relied upon tried and true classical techniques (from various approaches) to strengthen

and expand vocal response. Singers who performed in any style of music, outside of theatre, were on their own as to developing their vocal skills. Singers who were in music theatre could take classical voice lessons or speech training or both, or they might be good belters without any training who could also act. In all cases, if the singers were trained, the training was classical, and if they performed music in one of the "non" styles, they were on their own to figure out what of, and how, to apply the ideas gained in their lessons to their actual repertoire.<sup>11</sup>

The basic principles of vocal function in Somatic Voicework™ The LoVetri Method are very simple. They are: isolation, development, and combination of chest and head registers to create a balanced mix, undistorted vowels, and strong, aligned posture which facilitates deep and easy inhalation and exhalation. If you learned and understood only this about vocal production, and you applied these principles to a wide range of pitches and volumes, and added consonants, you wouldn't need anything else to become a good vocal technician.

If you do not understand register function as an auditory phenomenon, and you do not understand that this is a vocal fold behavior as well, you can waste a lot of time on 'resonance' (something you can't control until you have a good deal of skill and power), and you can confuse vocal quality with vowel sound quality (a very bad mistake) which will make you spin your wheels. If you believe that everything comes from the breathing, then you can waste a lot of time, years or maybe even decades, developing your ability to breath, but if you do not also work on your sound, all you will get from doing this is to be a really excellent breather.<sup>12</sup>

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**Woodruff:** What are the core technique distinctions between classical and CCM singing styles?

**LoVetri:** CCM styles all have their own parameters but are linked by their common roots in the speaking voice. Some of the CCM styles don't venture far from speech in terms of range and volume and all the CCM styles are amplified electronically—something that is not yet common in classical music styles. That one thing, in itself, is a huge difference that is generally ignored by vocal pedagogues. Classical singing can diverge from speech quite a bit in several parameters—it can be louder; it covers more range, and is usually head register dominant for women in most of their range.

\* \* \* \* \*

One of the complaints of classical teachers is a misunderstanding of the professional expectations of CCM auditions and singers, and misapplication of classical *fach* terminology.

There is currently no authoritative system of voice classification in non-classical music. The problem lies in the fact that classical terms are used to describe not merely various vocal ranges, but specific vocal timbres each unique to those respective ranges, and produced by the classical training techniques with which most popular singers are not intimately familiar and which even those that are do not universally employ.<sup>13</sup>

**Woodruff:** What are additional distinctions between classical and CCM techniques?

**LoVetri:** Music theatre is the only genre that asks for specific vocal registers in auditions and in roles. The audition notices typically state the singer "must sing 'legit' to A," "must belt to D, and mix to F," or "must sing pop/rock belt to B." If you do not know what these terms mean, what the vocal qualities are, or what they sound like, when you arrive at your first auditions, you find out right away.

You are expected to know the difference. If you do not, you run the risk of making yourself look foolish and not getting work. There are people who can sing in many different qualities (legit, mix, belt) and those that just do one (rock belter). Performers are expected to know what kind of a role they are auditioning for; either because the show has been done before or because there is a description of it in the casting notice.

In all of the other Contemporary Commercial Music styles, you just sing as a "vocalist." It's up to the individual to decide what range and quality is most comfortable and appropriate. In classical music, you might be a dramatic tenor or a *lyrico spinto* soprano or a *basso cantante*, or you might span two categories on certain roles, but you are expected to know what kind of an instrument you have and what kinds of roles are appropriate for it.

One of the principal distinctions between CCM and classical vocal music lies in the area of vocal quality. When singers change the style in which they sing, they must also change the vocal production and quality for each style.

Significantly, all the styles we are discussing arose from untrained singers in various parts of the United States when the regions were quite isolated from each other. Jazz came from the south, blues from the southeast. The origins of rock are disputed, but some say it originated in the south and others say it came from Chicago. Country music comes from Appalachia; folk music came from several places, having links to Europe through the early settlers. African Americans had an influence on all styles except perhaps country and bluegrass. None of the early vocalists were trained to use breath support or resonance of any kind, but developed the ability to be heard without fatigue through trial and error. The vocal quality associated with belting specifically can be found in diverse multi-national music, because it arises from speech (generally male speech), and as such, does not belong to one culture or time. In order to be heard, in order for the voice to carry in a building, or across an open field, you found, through trial and error the sound that seemed to "project," because if

you did not, you wore your voice out. You can hear this sound in Mariachi, Flamenco, Balkan, and Middle Eastern music and in many kinds of music from Africa and other cultures. Belting does not fit into the western modality of classical singing, but vocal pedagogues would like it to, and often bring to the teaching of belting the same ideas of resonance and breath support that they use in classical training. These ideas may or may not be useful. Although most singing teachers would say that formal training enhances belting, no one has really done a controlled study to ascertain whether or not this is true.

\* \* \* \* \*

Classical vocal training is many different things. Recognizing that is a first step to organizing it into a coherent philosophy that has defined ingredients. If you are singing early music (Pre-Baroque), the current consensus about what is correct vocal production for those styles is different than it was 35 years ago. If you are singing contemporary classical music, written by living or recently deceased composers, almost anything could be part of making the sounds required in the various works. If you sing mainstream music from "standard" repertoire (Mozart, Schubert, Fauré,



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# ON THE VOICE

Verdi, Puccini, Britten), the sounds you need to make might vary by vocal category (*fach*), by venue (concert hall, opera house, church, recital stage), or by accompaniment (piano, small ensemble, orchestra, electronic amplification). Thoughts about vibrato, mouth shape, vowel sound colors, linguistic considerations (separate from but related to spoken languages), legato, accuracy of melismatic lines, and control over volume for expressive purposes, depend on the most prevalent or predominant ideas about style as accepted in the general classical musical marketplace.<sup>14</sup>

**Woodruff:** Can you further describe those discrete aspects of classical performance?

**LoVetri:** Other differences are that classical performers are asked to generate a specific set of resonance frequencies (the *singer's*

*formant cluster*) and a good deal of volume as needed; singers must sing with consistent vibrato and be able to create a legato vocal line while doing their best to pronounce consonants clearly. Classical singers must be able to vary volume and vowel sound quality or timbre, and they need to know the differences in eras and styles (Mozart versus Puccini, or *bel canto* versus *verismo*). They will need to be comfortable singing in several languages, and they will need to be able to fit their voices into existing roles or works with specific pitch ranges, as one cannot re-write the music to fit one's capacities but must develop the voice to fit the repertoire. Classical singers generally do not transpose roles (unless they are famous) but might adjust a key in an art song enough to make it more comfortable. They also learn roles and repertoire for their resume while they are young, in order to be ready for opportunities to sing at a moment's notice when they arise.

Most CCM styles ask for colloquial pro-

nunciation that is generally not too precise. In CCM, with the exception of Broadway/Music Theatre, you sing whatever you want to sing in any key with the "arrangement" of your choice. You can change the key of a song or the speed or even the style (from music theatre to jazz, for instance). If you are hired to sing a pre-arranged song or be in a group, you might have to adapt, but not always. Most CCM singers have a demo CD with several songs for promotional purposes, something classical vocalists do not usually have.

Music theatre singers do not learn entire roles just to know them. They have various songs prepared in full versions and shorter excerpts (usually sixteen bars) for auditions. Music theatre varies, but usually asks for clearer pronunciation than might be found in a concert venue or on a recording. Music theatre often allows for variance of rhythm and notes as long as it is not too exaggerated. Some music theater productions are slightly "updated" when revived, with small changes in the orchestration and/or vocal numbers. In classical music, you must sing the notes and note values as written with a few exceptions [such as period ornamentation] and, generally, we do not re-write Mozart to make it "modern," although stage productions can be quite different from the ideas envisioned by the originators of the work.

The most important difference between classical music and CCM styles is that we change vocal quality. There is nothing worse than hearing an opera singer bringing operatic vocal production into a rock, jazz, or pop song. Some artists think singing a song by the Beatles in a lofty head register; resonance-driven vocal production is perfectly fine but it really just makes singers look foolish and out of touch with reality.

\* \* \* \* \*

If you have been taught that everything is "placement" and "breath support" and that breathing has something to do with inhaling into the diaphragm, (and who hasn't been taught those things?) you can spend much too long trying to get a

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person's sound to improve, develop, grow, adjust, or change to no avail.

If you can get a good, strong, undistorted, non-manipulated, and free open [a] (as in Father) on a low note at a loud vowel, you can assume that you have a healthy chest register response. If you can get a clear, light, easy undistorted [u] (true) on a high pitch at a moderate to loud volume, you can assume that you have access to a healthy head register function (that doesn't mean you can sing a whole song there, however). If you can sing an [e] or an [æ] on a middle pitch at moderate volume, you probably have some kind of balance or mix. "Probably" is the operating word.

You have to know what kind of sound is good in order to get a good sound. You have to know what you want before you open your mouth and you have to know that you are going to get that sound before you try to make it. Being able to do that, on demand, every time, is having "secure vocal technique." If you do not know what "good" sounds like, especially in yourself, you have to learn. If you do not know what comfortable is, you have to learn that too. If you do not have control over all the dimensions of your voice (pitch, vowel, volume, consonants, duration, pressure [volume] and vibrato [some/none]), you don't really have "vocal technique" at all, and you just sing however you do.

The purpose of training the voice is to give you skills you wouldn't have if you didn't seek them. That includes expanding your range both up and down, expanding your dynamic expression (both louder and softer), being able to lengthen the time you can easily exhale during a sustained phrase, and being able to control the volume while you extend it, up to and including getting louder at the end or when you go up or

both. You need to feel that you are singing easily and freely and that the sound responds well and that you can feel emotional while singing and that the emotion is reflected in the sound without you having to "make it emotional." You need to be able to go very quickly or very slowly without issue. You need to be able to sing in a variety of tone qualities and colors in order to be effective in various contrasting styles. You need to look and feel congruent with the words and music while you sing. Trying to control your diaphragm isn't going to help you do any of these things.

Somatic Voicework™ is functional training based on practical application, one person at a time. Everyone is the same and everyone is different. All voices are unique and all people are distinctively themselves but everyone has two vocal folds and a larynx, a pair of lungs, ribs, and abdominal muscles. Vocal function is the same for any human being but vocal output is unique to the person, the age, the background, the training, the music, the interests, and many other things.

There are a lot of people out there calling themselves singers who have no clue about the above. Some of these people also teach. (Unfortunately.) If you do not understand what I have written here, and you either sing or teach, you have, in my opinion, a moral obligation to learn about these things.<sup>15</sup>

There are some pedagogues who allege that the simultaneous utilization of classical and CCM voice function techniques simply is not healthy or practical. LoVetri, along with other workshop faculty, demonstrates the ability to navigate multiple styles at her annual, summer CCM workshops.

**Woodruff:** When you sing at your summer workshop you take a break between styles.

Do you find it easier to move from classical singing to CCM or vice versa?

**LoVetri:** I have always found it easier to go from classical to CCM, so I do the classical music first. I take a break and give my throat a few minutes to "recalibrate" because I do not want to manipulate the sound, but sing it freely and authentically. Now that I am older; (as of this interview, I am sixty-two) it takes longer to switch gears. If I don't rest for a few minutes, sometimes the gear shifting in the middle is unsettled and I can lose control there. When I was younger, however, I could more easily go back and forth.

I believe that people who sing "a little of each" are quite capable of doing so very easily and well. I also know from experience, both as a vocalist and as a teacher for nearly forty years, that at some point, if one is serious about a career, specializing makes sense. Yes, you can be a high belter, but I do not think that such a person would do a "legit" or classical sound as well. It's like being an Olympic athlete—you don't sprint and also do marathons. If you are a multiple styles artist, as music theatre singers must be, you can be very good at the various styles, but not as good as someone who only does one. The muscles involved can only change with equilibrium if the demands made are not extreme. I think I am the only person who says that and my reason is simple. I sing and have always sung both CCM and classical music and am still doing so at 62. I have been told that I do not sound "old" and that you cannot detect in either classification that I do the opposite one. That's how it should be.

\* \* \* \* \*

## CCM And Choirs

Traditional classical pedagogy has been applied to group voice instruction and choral ensembles. Yet, many within the choral community still assume *a priori* that applied voice function has no place within the choral ensemble experience. The incoherence and impracticality of this notion is evident in the renewed interest in performance practice,

# ON THE VOICE

and the current penchant for the inclusion of music of non-Western ethnic styles. In point of fact, attentiveness to voice function is an essential ingredient to an accomplished choral sound, enhancing the ability of the singer to intelligently and musically respond to the requirements of the period and style practice. In the same way, CCM function must be coherently addressed in the choral setting. Having sung in and coached a number of choirs, LoVetri offers some unique perspective on the ability of choristers to successfully navigate multiple styles.

**Woodruff:** You have long-standing relationships with choirs, including the Brooklyn Youth Chorus Academy. What are some practical tips for the application of CCM pedagogy to the choral/group setting?

**LoVetri:** I have been associated with the Brooklyn Youth Chorus Academy as its Singing Specialist since its inception in 1992. We use the ideas I have created in my method, Somatic Voicework,<sup>™</sup> but we have adapted those principles to address the needs of children's voices and also include musicianship training into the approach. BYCA calls

their program *Cross-Choral Training*.<sup>™</sup> Two voice scientists, one in Florida and one in England, have studied the program, and both authors have had their articles published in the *Journal of Voice*.<sup>16</sup> We train the children to sing in a pure, traditional head register dominant production associated in many people's minds with an "angelic sound" and we also train them to sing in a chest mix or speaking voice quality. The sound is very different, depending on what they sing and this is deliberate. Two years ago, the Concert Chorus sang at Madison Square Garden with Elton John for his sixtieth birthday and within the same week with the New York Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall. As you can imagine, both concerts were very different. There is very little incidence of vocal health problems and we do monitor them for such. We're proud of that.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Brooklyn Youth Chorus Academy<sup>®</sup> is a uniquely positioned organization, working with a large number of international names from both the CCM and classical music worlds. The chorus regularly performs alongside artists as disparate as Elton John and the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. As such, the singers need to be able to adapt their vocal style according to the musical genre being performed. Cross-Choral Training<sup>®</sup> (C-CT) is BYCA's program for developing vocal and musicianship skills in a choral setting. C-CT enables the singers to perform intentionally in a variety of coordinated adjustments and vowel sound qualities so the chorus can easily respond to the musical and expressive demands of diverse repertoire, including both CCM and classical styles of performance, and can sing any style of music appropriately.<sup>17</sup>

**Woodruff:** What sort of training is utilized by the staff of the Brooklyn Youth Chorus Academy?

**LoVetri:** The training is done as part of their normal rehearsals. Dianne Berkun, artistic director and founder of BYCA, uses exercises I have formulated. She integrates musicianship and vocal technique and I integrate voice science and vocal health off and on throughout the school year. Some of the children who have grown up singing with us end up with an excellent capacity to sing classically and in other styles. They also frequently know a great deal about vocal production and voice science. It's terrific to have one of the kids come to tell me that something is going on with her voice and explain exactly what's wrong. They are always accurate and we are happy that they can self-monitor that way.

**Woodruff:** Many schools have only one ensemble to fulfill the roles of concert choir and show or jazz choir. What should a choral director keep in mind with regard to programming for multiple styles?

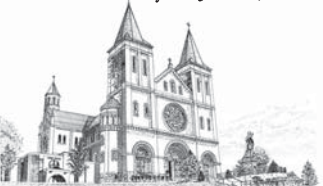
**LoVetri:** A choral director should not expect his or her choristers to sing different styles of music with the same vocal quality. The vocal quality appropriate to the music, if it is known, should always be respected. Stylistic changes, like pronunciation, should also change but they do not make up for vocal quality. The vocal quality needed should be taught on an on-going basis for some time before the director expects the chorus to deliver the specific sounds that are best for any given song or arrangement. If the director is not familiar with vocal quality as a separate vocal function, s/he should take some voice science courses in order to make this clear.

"Taking chest register up" is the function that causes the most confusion and difficulty because traditional vocal pedagogy has told us that this was harmful or wrong, but this is an old wives' tale. Using the principles of voice science, it is quite possible to sing well in any vocal quality, even chest register carried up high, but one must absolutely understand how to create this vocal behavior in a healthy and musically viable manner. Many classically trained singers mistakenly think that belting (a quality found in many kinds of CCM styles) is just yelling or singing

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in a nasal sound, but neither of these ideas is correct. This has almost nothing to do with resonance changes and very little to do with special kinds of breath support, so it can be confusing to someone who has had only those concepts to use when dealing with singing training.

With regard to programming, consider doing the lighter, headier pieces earlier in the program, as doing chesty songs will make it more difficult to go back to singing heady songs in all but the oldest and strongest vocalists. Further, flattening can result if too much chest is introduced in singers who do not have strong head-register-dominant technique to counter balance it, so waiting until the end of a program to put in chestier songs will help intonation stay accurate.

Also, recognize that having a show choir asks that you borrow some performance practices from theater and dance. Movement will affect vocal production.

If you are performing a jazz piece, recognize that jazz as a form is meant to be freely varied—so if your choir is singing a set arrangement, many people would argue that it isn't really jazz at all! All of these things matter when considering vocal style and the final output of a song or concert.

Choral conductors should understand that intonation will fluctuate with register quality in beginners. That's because we "tune the tube to itself" through what we hear and, to a lesser extent, feel. The length and thickness of the folds and the amount of pressure on them when they are making sound, coupled with the vertical height of the larynx in the throat and the shapes made by the muscles in the back and front of the mouth and tongue, all effect tuning. Therefore, register balance has a direct effect upon pitch control and overtones, which we hear as intonation. Conductors must be patient and allow the students time to get adjusted to these behaviors. As they become more comfortable, the pitch issues will resolve.

**Woodruff:** Many choral concerts include musical settings from non-Western countries, often requiring "extended" vocal techniques. How may CCM pedagogy apply to these settings?

**LoVetri:** As mentioned, belting can be found in many kinds of ethnic music. It must be remembered that many of them are only chest register driven and were not intended to be sung by trained voices with high ranges. If you are doing a choral arrangement of a piece that was sung originally by Africans, or Native Americans, who did not have any formal musical or vocal training, you are already taking the music outside its original form of expression. When approaching music from any culture not our own, different criteria would apply. The music of the Far East has several unique parameters, depending upon the country, that are vocally and musically outside what our western ears recognize and understand. Directors should be sure to study these differences and take them into consideration when adding songs from these countries to their programs. Taking care to know the context in which the music is typically performed in a foreign culture and honoring that tradition in performance as much as possible is just as important with non-Western music as it is with CCM styles.

Vocal production is vocal production and vocal function is the same in all human beings. The larynx houses the vocal folds that close and vibrate when we make any voiced sound. The lungs are the reservoir of air and the abdominal muscles are the pressurizers. The throat and mouth, coupled together to form a tube above the vocal folds, create the vowel sound and the vocal timbre. The jaw opening, tongue position, mouth and lip position, face shape and activity, and alignment of the head over the torso all play a part in the overall output of the sound that we hear as "voice" and "resonance." Gaining control over all these variables takes time and is different for every person in application, although much can be learned in a group situation. Therefore, vocalists, young and old, should be encouraged to pay attention, develop awareness of feeling, movement, or sensation and cultivate greater sensitivity over all of the sensory feedback mechanisms. It is also important to learn to listen with an objective ear for vocal quality and consistency. Listening is the key component to vocal production, as the throat follows the mind (the ear).

Using "extended" techniques implies that the director understands healthy ways to make various kinds of sounds that may not be found in English or in Western classical music, including phonation on an inhalation, growling, clicks, noises, and shouts. Many kinds of sounds that are not beautiful are perfectly healthy and viable, but it requires skill to negotiate them. Again, if the director is not familiar with these kinds of techniques, she should seek training before using them with her choir.

\* \* \* \* \*

## CCM and Children

There are a variety of opinions regarding age-appropriate parameters for the voice training of children. Some teachers will not even consider working with pre-pubescent children. This opinion is also slowly changing, as evidenced in the various publications of notable pedagogues.<sup>18</sup> In her CCM workshops, LoVetri specifically discusses age-appropriate pedagogy concepts.

In the past, many teachers believed it was not wise to train a child who had not reached puberty. Today, however, things have changed, due, in part, to the idea that training does not have to mean operatic or classical vocal training. It is still true that a child cannot be handled like an adult, from the standpoint of vocal function, but proper training can help a child sing well in a school or church choir or in a local musical.

All children can benefit from postural work, breath work, and head register development. They can learn to sing with undistorted vowels, in a clear tone, with articulate diction and easy production. They can learn music and performance and they can be guided to develop as young vocalists who appreciate all kinds of singing.<sup>19</sup>

# ON THE VOICE

The understanding of the singing voice of children and adolescents is still in its infancy, and there is a lack of a general developmental model of the young voice, in particular with relation to young singers. Available research has largely also been on 'classically' trained voices, and contemporary commercial music (CCM) including pop/rock and musical theatre has largely been ignored.<sup>20</sup>

**Woodruff:** Related to your experiences with children's choirs, at what age can/should you begin working on these principals with young singers?

**LoVetri:** Our youngest [BYCA] choristers are six and seven years old. They don't get much development of anything beyond head register and a little speaking voice on the lowest notes and a little bit about posture and breathing. The slightly older singers get some technical work, especially register-based training, so they understand that there are these two kinds of sounds that we can "mix" in different ways in their middle range. The intermediate singers (junior high

school) learn to sing more deliberately in chest register, carrying it up a little higher than the younger voices and the oldest singers (high school) are expected to be able to not only sing in chest, mix, and head register dominant sounds in mid-range, but to control and change vowel sound shaping independently in each quality without losing control over volume. This is very difficult and takes time, but they do all master it after a certain amount of exposure to the exercises and explanations. Posture and breathing is always emphasized and we work on physical coordination of the ribs (intercostals) and abs (all four layers of them) continuously. They sing many public performances and are in demand, especially since they won a Grammy in 2002, with all the top musical and professional artists that come into New York. Dianne and the two associate conductors do a terrific job making sure the children sing well and I consult with all chorus divisions to make sure the vocal training stays in the Cross-Choral Training™ framework we developed.

I want to make sure that readers understand that "mix" is a function of register balance, not a "resonance" response although

the "resonances" or the acoustic spectrum will change. We do not teach the children to change what they feel or where the sound vibrates, we teach them to listen and to be aware of what is happening as the vocal qualities change. We get those changes through specific vocal exercises which I developed and which Dianne teaches. The mix emerges in response to the exercises, regardless of whether or not the child realizes it.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Counsel

One of the essential elements in the understanding of classical and CCM pedagogy is the development of an aural catalog of healthy singing.

**Woodruff:** Do you have a suggested listening list of exemplary singers or choirs?

**LoVetri:** I had occasion to sit in very briefly once on the Mormon Tabernacle Choir rehearsal and was extremely impressed with the efficiency with which they rehearsed. I have always admired this choir, because it could easily be awful, since it is so big and its members are, as I understand it, not all professionals, but it sounded as good in person as it does on its recordings.

I have heard many excellent professional choirs here in New York at various concerts, most of which were "ringer" choruses, that is, professional vocalists who were hired by an agent to sing the rehearsals and performances, meaning that they were not a choir before or after the professional "gig." The idea that professionally trained classical singers who use vibrato cannot blend fades here in New York City when you hear those choruses and also those at the Met and NY City Opera that are quite capable of blending. I have also heard transcendent performances in churches and at various concert venues. Recently, I heard a small Russian liturgical men's chorus that was just stunning. I admit being very prejudiced in that I really like the Brooklyn Youth Chorus and its truly American sound.

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My personal list of singers that I admire is very long. At the top is Luciano Pavarotti, followed by Dame Joan Sutherland, Leontyne Price, and Marilyn Horne. I also admire many of today's classical vocalists including Renee Fleming, Thomas Hampson, Bryn Terfel, Dimitri Hvorotovsky, and Dianna Damrau. I have always been a big fan of Barbara Streisand, Ella Fitzgerald, Aretha Franklin, Tony Bennett, Rosemary Clooney, Brian Stokes Mitchell, and Audra McDonald. I loved the Beatles, the Four Seasons, and the Beach Boys but now I love Gnarls Barkley, Rascal Flatts, the Dixie Chicks, and the Black-Eyed Peas. I like Beyoncé, Christina Aguilera, Adam Lambert, and Adele. I like Dolly Parton, Reba McEntire, and Willie Nelson. It runs the gamut. I still love to listen to Connie Francis. I am a big fan of Jenny Burton, who is unknown but shouldn't be, and am blessed to also have many wonderful professional students whose work I much admire.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Conclusion

Stylistic devices that would have 'classical' singers running for cover are contemporary commercial singers' bread-and-butter. We can either pronounce their work as 'all of the devil' or provide technical, physiological, and emotional support to those learning and working within these areas. Is constriction a sin? (Yanagisawa, Estill et al., 1989). If Elaine Strich's singing teacher had cured her of constriction, where would that Broadway legend be now? She's over 70, currently performing a sell-out one-woman show on Broadway, and belting safely and brilliantly. Should we send Tom Waits along to have a few drop-in lessons at the Conservatorium to get rid of that awful vocal fry of his? Isn't breathy onset a vile vocal fault? It hasn't hurt George Benson's career much, or the late and great Peggy Lee. What if a zealous vocal coach fixed Dolly Parton's hypernasality?

Why didn't young Johnny Farnham's singing teacher tell him years ago to stop flipping into falsetto? It gets you nowhere if you want to use your voice professionally. Can't Kylie Minogue get rid of that white sound in her voice? A bit of decent vibrato would improve her, wouldn't it?<sup>21</sup>

At first blush, it may appear that the profession of singing requires a singular, Western, classically-oriented pedagogy. However, that perspective has become dubious with the availability of comprehensive, verifiable voice research. Students and teachers alike have no further to look than Richard Miller's classic text *National Schools of Singing*,<sup>22</sup> or to note the tonal differences between Wagnerian and Lieder singers, to dispel the myth that classical singing is and has always been a single, cohesive entity. And even a cursory expedition through current, professional performances, let alone the corresponding research, reveals the breadth of style and technique variations demanded in the musical marketplace.

Clearly, the professional demands on today's choral and solo singers have expanded exponentially with the proliferation of popular genres—in other words, the canon has broadened. It is further evident that the rising solo performer, chorister, educator, and church musician must be adept at negotiating the techniques of multiple styles, for solo and choral performance. The task of the voice pedagogue, therefore, must be to become fluent in the pedagogy of multiple styles, including the array of genres known as Contemporary Commercial Music. Jeannette LoVetri, along with her students and CCM colleagues, stands as a proud witness to the prospect of mastering multiple styles, and the success of applied voice function.

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<sup>8</sup> "The 'Pop' Singer and the Voice Teacher." AATS 1986 reprint of 1966 NATS Journal September/October issue. Academy Publications. <http://www.americanacademyofteachersofsinging.org/assets/articles/popsingervoice teacher.pdf>

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## Video

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Video interviews with Jeannette LoVetri may be found at the Shenandoah University CCM Institute Web site: <http://ccminstitute.wordpress.com/video-jeannette-lovetri/>.